

THE
SUFFICIENCY
OF A
Standing Revelation.

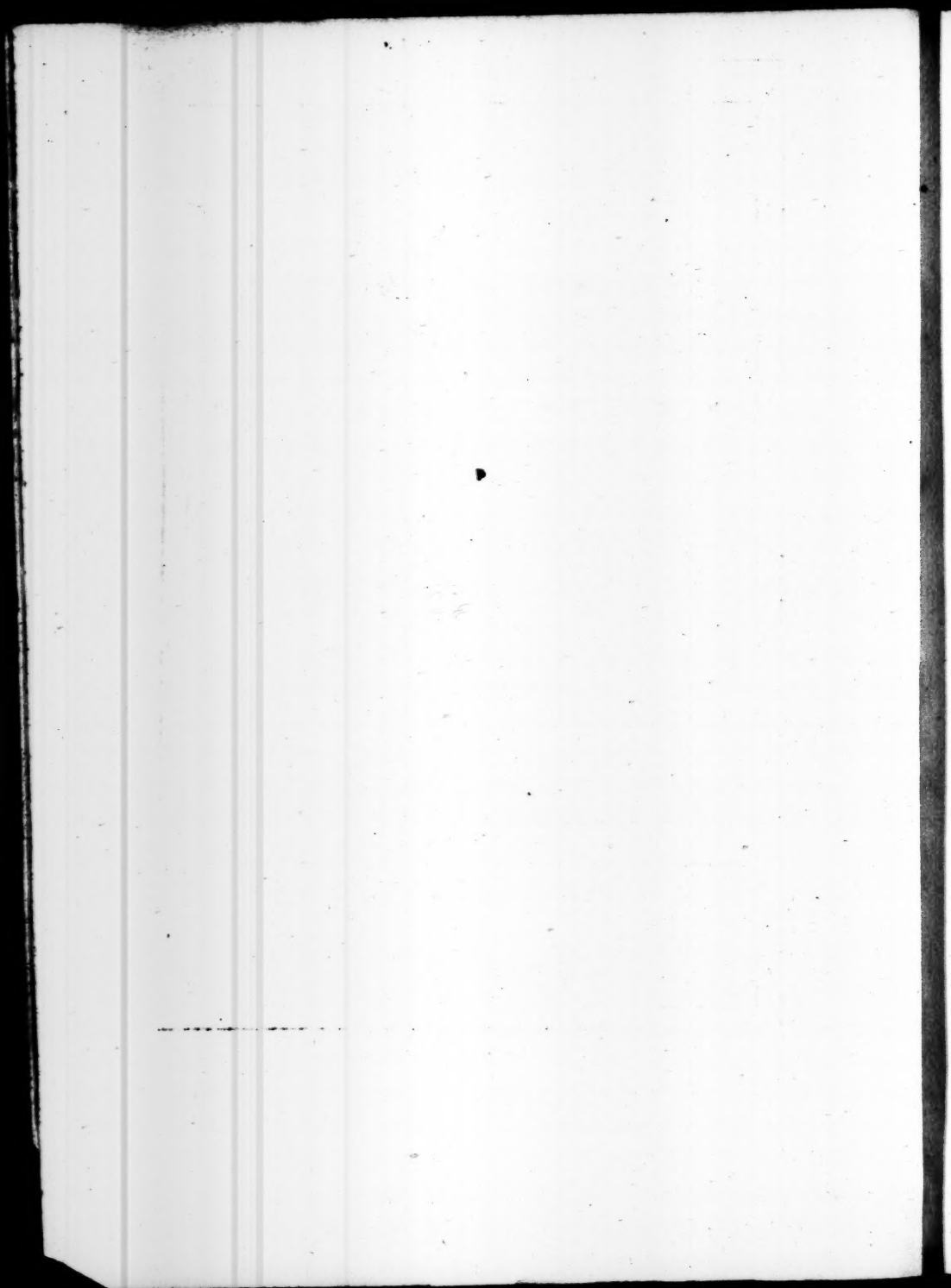
A
SERMON

Preach'd at the
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul*,
January the 1st. 1⁶⁹⁹/₇₀₀.

BEING
The First, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, Rector
of *St. Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary
to His MAJESTY.

L O N D O N,
Printed by *J. Leake*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's-
Head* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, 1700.



To the most Reverend Father in G O D,

T H O M A S

Lord Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury* ;

Sir HENRY ASHURST Baronet ;

Sir JOHN ROTHERAM, Serjeant at Law ;

JOHN EVELYN Senior Esquire ;

Trustees appointed by the Will of the Honourable
ROBERT BOTTLE Esquire.

Most Reverend and Honoured,

I Beg leave humbly to present you with these
First-fruits of my Labours in that Station
which you have been pleased to assign me for
this Year ; Taking this Occasion both to acknow-
ledge publickly, and with all Thankfulness the
Honour you have done me in appointing me to this
Work ; and likewise to give you Assurance that
the After-fruits shall also in due Time be offered
to you, if God shall be pleased to give them a
Season to ripen ; And I heartily wish they may
be better and more worth your Acceptance than I
am sensible these are.

However, I hope the same Goodness and kind
Opinion of me which moved you to nominate me to

the Employment will incline you to forgive all my Failings in the Management of it.

And if my Labours shall be well accepted by you ; And especially , If by the Blessing of God, (who only giveth the Increase) they shall any Ways contribute toward the Promoting the pious Design of the Honourable Founder of these Lectures, of blessed Memory , I shall be very easie under the too just Charge of Insufficiency for such an Undertaking, which I make no Doubt will be cast upon me by those who will be inwardly glad that I have performed my Task no better, and will earnestly wish that the Christian Cause may never have an abler Advocate.

But that by your wise Choice of Persons to succeed in this Employment, they may see themselves every Year disappointed in this their Wish, is the hearty Desire of,

Most Reverend and Honoured,

Your most obliged

Feb. 26. 1722.

and obedient Servant

OFSP. BLACKALL.

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THESE words contain some of the Discourse that passed between *Abraham* in Heaven, and a certain *rich Man* in Hell ; occasioned by a Request which he had made in the foregoing Verses, in the behalf of his *five Brethren* whom he had left alive upon Earth ; that *Abraham* would be so kind as to *send Lazarus to them, to testify to them, lest they also should come into that Place of Torment.* And the general Design of them , and indeed of the whole Parable of which they are a Part, is to assert the *Sufficiency* of those Means which God hath thought fit to use to bring Men to Repentance, particularly by granting them a *standing Revelation* of his Will ; and the probable Unsuccessfulness of any other Method that we could propose, and perhaps might think more proper for this Purpose.

And when these Words were first spoken, it was with a special Reference to the State of the *Jews*, and
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and to that Light, and those Means of Salvation which were afforded to them, at the Time when *our Saviour* began his Preaching; when all the *standing Revelation* of God's Will, was contained in the Books of *Moses*, and in the Writings of the *Prophets*.

But since then our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the eternal Son of God, a more credible Messenger than *Lazarus* from the dead, has come himself in Person to assure us that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and to shew us the Means of attaining that, and avoiding this; and God having raised him up from the dead, after he had been crucified by the *Jews*, has given sufficient Assurance to the World of his divine Mission; And that *Jesus* did and said such things, and that he died and rose again, we have the Testimony of his *Apostles*, and others, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses thereof, and who in Confirmation of their Testimony were empowered by God to do as great Miracles as *Jesus* himself had done; And lastly, of what was done and taught by *our Saviour* and his *Apostles*, we have very credible Records still remaining, *viz.* the Books of the *New Testament*; the Authority of which is at least as well proved to us, as ever the Authority of the *Old Testament* was to the *Jews*: So that we now have plainly more and stronger Motives to Repentance, than the *Jews* before *our Saviour's* Time had; we consequently do stand in less need of new Miracles and new Revelations than they did; And therefore the Argument in the Text, as it may be applied to us who live now, is much stronger than as it was here urged by *Abraham* with Reference to the *Jews*, while they had only *Moses* and the *Prophets*.

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And thus in my Discourse upon the Words, I shall now consider it, *viz.* as if the Request made by the *rich Man* in the Behalf of his Brethren, in the two foregoing Verses, were made now in the Behalf of those to whom the Revelation of the Gospel has been given, but without Success; and as if the Answer here returned to it by *Abraham*, had been suited to the present State of things.

And from the words, thus largely understood, I shall take occasion to speak to these Three Points.

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the Books of the *Old* and *New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (I add, they have also Christ, and his Apostles;) let them hear them.*

II. I shall shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an unreasonable Request to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, That in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and *standing Revelation* of the Gospel, would
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be perswaded by this Means. *If they hear not Moses, and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be perswaded, though one rose from the dead.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the Books of the *Old and New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to perswade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.*

And, I think, that if the *standing Revelation* which God hath made of his Will in the Holy Scriptures, can upon any account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be upon one of these two Accounts; viz. Either, 1. Because no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular Defects in that *standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture*, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose as 'tis possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

1. It may be pretended that no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose. I am now therefore to enquire with what Reason this can be pretended.

And in speaking to this Point, it does not lie upon me to prove that God could not reveal his Mind afresh to every Man in every Age of the World, if he so pleased; for there is no question but that the same God who in *divers manners spake in times past to our Fathers by the Prophets*, could, if he pleased, speak to every one of us their Children, in such Manner as he then spake to the Prophets themselves; so that we might be all immediately taught of God as they were. But every

every thing that may be done is not expedient to be done ; And whether this Method would be expedient or not, will be hereafter enquired.

Neither does it now lie upon me to prove, that this Way which God hath thought fit to take to instruct the greatest Part of the World, viz. by a *standing Revelation*, is the best Way, and the most like to be effectual of any that could be used. Of this I shall likewise have Occasion to speak somewhat hereafter.

But what lies upon me at present to make good, is only this, That a *standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men.

And if there be any Ground for the contrary Pretence, I think it must be, either, 1. Because all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot at once be committed to Writing : Or, 2. Because there cannot be sufficient Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any Writing that is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so.

1. It may be said, That all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot be at once committed to Writing : Because every Age of the World produces new Opinions, which whether they be erroneous or not, cannot be judged by a *Criterion* that was given many Ages before these Opinions were broached : And as the World grows older in Years, it likewise improves in Wickedness, which cannot be restrained and suppressed by an old Law which was made before several Instances of those Wickednesses that are now practised were either known or thought of. And if it were not so, what need would there be of such a number of Books as are written in every Age to direct Men how to distinguish between Truth and

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Error, and what Opinions to fix upon in that great Variety of Opinions that are offered to them? Or what need would there be of so many new Laws as are daily made in every Commonwealth to restrain the growing Extravagances of Mankind, and to keep them within due Bounds? So that if there be any Necessity at all of divine Revelation to teach Men the Belief of Truth and the Practice of Righteousness, it is necessary that there should be a new and fresh Revelation made, at least as often as any new Error is broached, or any new Piece of Villainy is practised in the World.

But to this Objection against the *Sufficiency* of a *Standing Revelation*, I suppose a full Answer will be given in these two particulars.

(1.) That there is no Arguing from the Wisdom and Power of Men, to the Wisdom and Power of God. It may be granted to be impossible for a Man to write such a Book as shall be *sufficient* to confute all the Errors that can possibly at any time afterwards spring up; Or to compile such a Body of Laws as shall be *sufficient* to prevent or punish all future Crimes; But what is impossible with Men, may be possible with God; who has a perfect Foresight of all the Errors that will ever be broached, and of all the Wickedness that will ever be practised by Men to the End of the World, To a Being of infinite Wisdom and Knowledge it may be not only possible, but very easie so to contrive a Revelation, designed by him for the Direction of future Ages, that no Addition shall ever after need to be made to it. Nay indeed,

(2.) The Thing it self, that is, That a *standing Revelation* should be thus perfect; that it should be so contrived at once, and at first, as to be *sufficient* to answer

answer all the Ends of a divine Revelation as long as the World shall last, is not very hard to be conceived.

For tho' Error be infinite, Truth, at least all Truth necessary to be believed, is finite and limited; And after a divine Revelation is once given, no more is necessary to be believed in after Ages than was at first; nor will there ever be more things necessary to be believed to the End of the World, unless God shall please to add some new Revelation to the former. And this Revelation of all necessary Truth once made, being given to Men that are endued with Reason, nothing more is, or ever will be needful for the Discovery and Confutation of all Errors that can possibly spring up in after Ages, but only a right Understanding of the Truths already delivered, and a right Use of Reason in making Inferences, and drawing Consequences therefrom. And this is all that is pretended to by the Books of Controversie that are written in every Age: The Design of them is not to declare new Truths, or to establish new Articles of Faith, but only to shew that those Opinions which they represent as false and erroneous, are either in themselves, or in their true Consequences, contrary to some Maxims that are already receiv'd as true.

And it is no less easie to conceive that a *standing Revelation* may be at once so contrived as to be for ever *sufficient* to direct Men in all Points of *Practice*: Because altho' tis possible that every Age may afford new Instances of Wickedness, yet the Law that they are all Transgressions of, may be but one. And the Rule once given is a perpetual Direction, not only what to do, but likewise what to avoid; and this, as well in those Instances of Wickedness which may be invented afterwards, as in those which were in Practice before the

Rule was made. For he that giving Direction to a Traveller in his Way, bids him *keep strait forward*, shall not need, (if he speaks to a Man of Reason) to tell him, over and above, that he must be careful to avoid all Turnings to the right hand or to the left ; and much less shall he need to give him a particular Account of every Turning that he is to avoid. And tho' in Time to come there would be many more By-ways and Turnings out of the Road than there are at present, yet the same one Direction, *to keep strait forward*, will be as full and as sufficient a Direction then, as it is now.

And the Necessity that Humane Law-givers find themselves under to be every Day repealing former Laws and adding new Ones, is not caused by an absolute Impossibility of making at once such a Body of Laws as might be *sufficient* for all after Times ; but arises (as I suppose) Partly from the Nature of Humane Laws, which are, for the most part, Negative and Prohibitive only ; and by such a Law nothing is rendred unlawful but what is named ; and to name at once every thing that is then, or may be in all after Ages needful to be prohibited, would indeed be a Work of very great Difficulty ; Partly, from the Nature of that Obedience that is due to a meer Humane Law, which is only an external Obedience, and to the Letter of the Law ; and that indeed must needs be a Law, or a Body of Laws of a prodigious Bulk, and very difficult to be contrived at once, which in the Letter thereof shall comprehend and give Direction concerning every Action, and every Mode of Action that are necessary to be done or forbore, in order to the preserving Justice and Peace among Men ; Partly, from the little Regard that Men generally have to the good of Posterity, which makes them only careful to contrive such Orders

ders and Constitutions, as they hope will suffice to preserve Peace in their own time, leaving it to those that come after, to take the like Care for themselves in their Times; Partly, from the Weakness and Ignorance of the wisest of Men, who not understanding exactly the Tempers of all their Subjects, cannot know certainly what Effect their Laws will have, till after they have been for some time experienced; And partly, from the unexpected Difficulty that is sometimes met with in the Execution of a Law, which may make it necessary afterwards to enforce it with a greater Penalty, or to take some further Care than at first was thought needful to see it executed.

But none of these Reasons of the Necessity of new Laws among Men are of any force to shew that it is also necessary that God should be every Day making new Declarations of his Will, and that no *Standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for all Times; For the Laws of God are positive and commanding, enjoining the truest and heartiest Love both to God and Men, and every natural and proper Expression thereof, and by consequence prohibiting every Affection of Mind, and every outward Act that is contrary thereto, whether it be expressly named or not; And the Obedience that we owe to a divine Law, is the Obedience of the Heart and of the whole inner Man, such as looks beyond the Letter to the Design and Intention of the Law, and avoids as carefully whatsoever is contrary to the Reason of the Law, as if it had been forbidden in the most express Words: And God being King for ever and ever, has the same Relation to all Men in all Ages, and cannot but be supposed to design the good Government of his Subjects in after, as well as in former Times; And he also, understanding fully the Tem-
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pers of all his Subjects, knows beforehand what Effect the Laws he gives them will have, and can never be disappointed in his Expectation; and so can never be obliged to repeal or alter any of his Laws, by an unforeseen Experience, that they are not so convenient, or so effectual as he thought they would be; And lastly, He, having all Power in his Hands, and a sovereign and uncontrollable Dominion over all, can appoint what Penalty he pleases to the Transgression of his Laws; can at any time convict Transgressors by his own unerring Knowledge only, and the Testimony of their guilty Consciences, without other Witnesses; and has it in his own single Power, without any Help of others, to execute, when-ever he will, whatever Penalty he threatens.

Thus, I think, it appears that a *standing Revelation* may be so well contrived, as to be *sufficient* for all Times; that all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times may be at once committed to Writing.

2. But Secondly, Tho' this be granted, it may be still further objected against the *Sufficiency* of a *Standing Revelation*, that it can hardly be *sufficiently* attested; that there cannot be *sufficient* Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any such Writing, which is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so; And that, (1.) Because there is no Way, but Eyewitness, to be *sufficiently* assured that any Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; (2.) Because there is no Way to be *sufficiently* assured, that the Author of such a Book did not design to impose upon his Readers; And (3.) Because no Man can be sure, that he himself was not deceived in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made
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to him ; or in the Truth of any other Matter which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

(1.) It may be said, that there is no Way but Eye-witness to be *sufficiently* assured that any Book was written by the Person that is said to be the Author of it.

But that is very strange , that there should be no other Way to be *sufficiently* assured of the Author of any Book, and yet that there are a great many Books in the World, ancient as well as modern, the Authors whereof were never in the least doubted of ; who yet, I suppose, did not use to call together a Company of Men to stand by, and see them write those Books which they intended to Publish.

It seems then, that either there may be, besides Eye-witness, *sufficient* Reason to believe that a Book was written by the Person under whose Name it goes ; or else that all the World has been extremely credulous in receiving an infinite Number of Books as written by such and such Authors, without *sufficient* Assurance thereof. But I believe the Truth is, There are some Men, who for Reasons best known to themselves, (but which may, some of them be easily enough guessed at) will not allow that to be *sufficient* Evidence that a Book was written by a Prophet or an Apostle, which they must and do allow to be *sufficient* Evidence in any other Case of the like Nature.

For in other Cases we make no Doubt to receive a Book as written by such an Author, if he owns himself to be the Author of it ; or if it be shewn written with his own Hand ; or if they that are the Publishers of it, declare that they had it from him, as his own ; or that they transcribed or printed it from a Copy which they knew to be of his Hand-writing ; or if it passes current in common Fame and Report to be his, and his
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most intimate friends believe it so, and he himself does not disown it, and there be none else that pretend any Claim or Title to it. Where these or most of these Circumstances do concur, we never doubt but that the Person said to be the Author of such a Book, is so indeed; unless there be some very clear Reason, grounded upon the known Incapacity of the Person to write in such a Language, in such a Style, concerning such a Subject, or the like, whereby it may be demonstrated, that (whoever was) he could not be the Author of it. The truth is, Now adays, (and I suppose the Case was much the same formerly) whoever is the true Author of any Book, finds very little Difficulty to make Men believe that the Book is his; the greatest Difficulty is for a Man to conceal himself, in case he be not willing to be known to be the Author of it.

And when once a Book is generally receiv'd as written by such a Person, (when, I say, 'tis thus receiv'd) in that Age in which it was first publish'd, and by those that were in the best Capacity to inquire and to judge who was the true Author of it; they that live in after times never think it reasonable to question the Authority thereof, unless there be, evidently, something, either in the Language, Dialect or Style; or else in the Matter of the Book, as in the Relation of some Piece of History, the References to some ancient Customs, the Citations out of other Authors, or the like; by which it may be clearly made out that the Book cannot be of such Antiquity as it pretends to, or could not be the Writing of that Person who is reported and has been commonly taken to be the Author of it.

Upon such Reasons as these, a great many Books are every Day received as written by such and such Authors;

thors; and tho' we cannot be so sure of a thing that we believe upon these Inducements, as we are of what we see with our own Eyes; yet such Reasons as these are by the general Consent of Mankind judged to be *sufficient* in a Matter of this Nature, which is hardly capable of better Proof. And for a Man to disallow in one Case that same Evidence of the Truth of a Matter of Fact, which in other Cases of the like kind he allows to be *sufficient*; for a Man to receive a Book as written by another Person, and not to receive a Book as written by a Prophet or an Apostle, when he has as much Reason to receive one as the other, and no more Reason to reject one than the other, is not Judgment, or Discretion, or reasonable Caution; but manifest Prejudice and Partiality. But,

(2.) It was further said, That tho' we might be well enough assured that a Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there is no Way to be *sufficiently* assured that who he was the Author of it did not design to impose upon his Readers.

It seems then, there is no Way to be *sufficiently* satisfied that any Man is an honest Man, and fit to be credited; that he does not lye in every thing he says, and intend a Cheat in every thing he does. For if a Man may be believed in what he says, he may as well be believed in what he writes; And if he may be trusted in one Concern, he may be as safely trusted in another, unless good Reason can be shewed to the contrary.

But in judging of humane Nature in general, Men commonly judge of others by themselves: What they are inclined to, they think is the Inclination of Mankind; what they allow themselves in, they think others, (whatever they may pretend) make as little scruple of as they do; what they freely practice, they make no

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Doubt other Men would practise as freely, on the same Occasions, and upon the same Inducements; So that when any Man is so very suspectful of the Honesty and Veracity of other Men, it gives but too just Ground to think that the Reason of his Aptness to distrust all others, is his Consciousness of his own evil Designs, and of the little Regard that he himself has to Truth in his own Assertions. And if those he has to deal with should refuse to give any Credit to any thing that he affirms, because, according to his own declared Opinion, very little Credit can reasonably be given to the Report and Affirmation of others, I do not see with what Reason he can blame them for so doing.

Not but that, after all, 'tis possible that a Man may ('tis doubtless what has been done by some) give out a Report, or write Book on purpose to deceive Mankind; But nevertheless, I say, that it ought not without very good Reason to be suspected that this is any Man's Design; and that we may have Assurance enough that a thing is not, which yet we must grant was possible to have been.— Particularly as to the Matter we are now speaking of.

First; In case the Author of any Book, or of any Report relates a Matter of Fact, of which there are not, nor well could be, any other Witnesses but himself; as if he says that he has received from God such a Revelation, with order to publish it to the World, or that he himself was an Eye or Ear-witness that such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; the Credibility of such a Report, whether written or spoken, depends, Partly, upon the Nature of the Report its self; Partly, upon the Credit of its Author; And partly, upon the Proofs that he gives of his Honesty and Veracity in that particular. And where there is a full
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Concurrence of all these, that is, When the Matter of the Report is credible in its self; when its Author is a Person of Credit; and when he gives the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular; there is no Reason to reject his Testimony, there is *sufficient* Reason to give Credit to it.

1. If the Matter of his Report be credible in its self. And if what he reports be, that he himself has receiv'd such a Revelation from God, with order to publish it to the World; I say, that this Report in the general is a credible Report; because it is very agreeable to the Goodness of God, and therefore not unlikely, that he should impart to Men, by a special Revelation, such things as are very useful for them to know, and which could not be known, or not so well; not so fully, clearly and certainly any other Way as by Revelation; and 'tis certainly not incredible, that he that has given us a Tongue to utter Words, and Skill to express thereby our Thoughts to one another, should have Power and Means to reveal and express his own Mind in such a Manner, that a Man may understand his Meaning; and 'tis likewise certainly not incredible in its self, that God, intending to declare his Will to Mankind, should make Use of the Ministry of a Man for this Purpose, and having made known his Will to one Man, give him Commission to communicate the same to others.

If therefore there be any thing incredible in the Report of a divine Revelation, it must be in the special Matter of it. But altho' the particular Matter of any such divine Revelation be such a thing as we could never have found out by natural Reason; I say, it is nevertheless credible as a Matter divinely revealed; if it implies no Contradiction; if it be not contrary to natural Reason; if it be not repugnant to a former divine

Revelation that is well attested; and if it be a Doctrine worthy of God; that is, If in its true Consequences it has no Tendency to encourage Sin; but on the contrary, has a plain Tendency to promote the Practice of Piety, and Virtue among Men. Against such a Revelation as this there can be no just Objection made from the Matter of it; There is no Improbability that such a Thing as this should be the Subject of a divine Revelation.

Or if what he reports be, that he himself was by when such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; In this case the Matter of his Report is credible in its self, if what he says he was an Eye or Ear-witness of, be a proper Object of those senses; if it be not an impossible thing; if it does not imply a Contradiction. And in this case, the Difficulty, the Strangeness, the Uncommonness of the Thing; its being a thing that was never known to be done or said before, or which no account can be given of by Reason, or natural Causes, is no just Exception to the Truth of it. There is nothing in this kind absolutely incredible, but what is plainly impossible. But,

2. The Credibility of any Report, (supposing the Matter of it to be credible) depends, in good Measure, upon the Credit of its Author.

And then a Man may reasonably be thought an Author, or a Witness of good Credit, in Matters of his own Knowledge, when he appears, and by all his other Words and Actions shews himself to be, grave, sober, considerate, and in his right Wits; when he is a Person of unblemished Reputation; when he was never known to lye, or feign, or deceive in other Cases; when he gives no just Ground to suspect that he is an intriguing or designing Person; And lastly, when he himself
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is no Party to the Cause, has no worldly Interest carrying on in it, no Design of Honour or Profit, or other temporal Advantage, that, to appearance, can be served by his giving such Testimony; when he will be neither the better if his Report be credited, nor the worse if it be not believed. Such a Witness as this cannot reasonably be excepted against.

3. But 3dly, Even such a Report made by such a Person, is still further credible, in case he gives also the best Proofs that can be given, or that the Case will bear, of his Veracity in that Particular.

And 'tis one very good Token of a Man's own firm Persuasion of the Truth of what he says, if he gives his Testimony in a grave and serious Manner, and if he appears to have at that Time a good sense of Religion in his Mind. Upon which Account a Solemn Oath, by which God is called upon to witness the Truth of what is said, is reck'ned the greatest Assurance that ordinarily can be given of the Truth of any humane Testimony; and therefore by Evidence given upon Oath all Questions of the greatest Consequence to Men in this World are finally decided; *An Oath for Confirmation is to Men an End of all Strife.* Heb. 6. 15. Seeing therefore that the great Credit that is given to an Oath, is grounded upon that serious Sense of Religion which the Witness is supposed to have in his Mind, when he declares that he speaks as in the Presence of Almighty God; whenever there is good Evidence given by any Person of the same serious Sense of Religion, his Testimony, 'tho' without the Formality of an Oath, is not less credible.

Again, It is a further Token of a Man's firm Belief of what he reports or affirms, in case, the Matter of his Report being such as is naturally influential upon Practice,

Practice, he himself lives and acts in all Respects agreeably thereto : And especially, if in Consequence thereof he declines making such Gain and Profit to himself as 'tis probable he would have done had he been otherwise perswaded ; and denies himself those worldly Pleasures and Sensual Gratifications which other Men not so perswaded, do freely allow themselves in ; and voluntarily undertakes such Labours, and endures such Hardships as it can hardly be supposed any Man of another Perswasion would undergo.

But the surest Token that any Man can give of his Veracity, is persisting in the Evidence he has once given to the last ; When no Promises of Wealth, Honour or Promotion can perswade him to forbear speaking the things which he has seen and heard ; when being brought before Kings and Rulers, and straitly threatened to hold his Peace, he is thereby rather the more emboldened to speak ; when being racked and tortured to retract his Evidence, he continues in the midst of the greatest Torments to witness the same thing that he did before ; And in fine, when having a certain Prospect before him of losing all that can be dear to him in this World, and even his Life its self, unless he will either go back from what he has said, or at least forbear to repeat and confirm it ; he willingly and cheerfully seals his Testimony with his Blood.

Such Assurance as this we may have of the Honesty and Veracity of a Person that witnesses a thing only of his own private Knowledge ; And this being the best we can have, he's an unreasonable Man that desires more, or says this is not sufficient.

But Secondly, in Case the Author of any Book, or of any Report, relates a Thing that was done or spoken publickly, in the Sight or Hearing of many others
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besides himself, we may have still greater Assurance, of his Honesty and Veracity, and of the Truth of the Report its self; And we have so, (we have, I think, the greatest that can be,) if, after the Report is published, especially if it be a Matter of great Consequence to the World, it be not contradicted by any of those that were present; and much rather, if they all, or a great many of them, agree in testifying the same thing; Especially if they also are Persons of the like good Credit, and if they also give the same Proofs and Tokens of their Veracity that he did.

Such Evidence as this of the Veracity of any Author in what he writes, is beyond all reasonable Exception. And therefore when many, and especially when all these Evidences of Truth and Honesty do concur, I think we may be *sufficiently* assured that he did not design to impose upon his Readers. But,

(3.) If we may be well enough assured of the Author of any Book, and also of his Honesty; yet, it was further objected, that this Author, whoever he was, could not be sure that he himself was not deceived, in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to him; Or in the Truth of any other Matter of Fact which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

But, first, If he could not be sure of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to himself; how then could any Man now a days be sure of the same, if God should vouchsafe to speak to us now, as 'tis said he did in former times to the Prophets and other inspir'd Men, by himself, or an Angel? So that this Objection, if it be well grounded, cuts off not only all reasonable Belief of former Revelations, but likewise all reasonable Belief of any Revelation that can now be made, to our selves or others; And 'tis to no Purpose to offer at any thing

thing to convince those of the Truth of any Revelation who are of Opinion that even the infinite Power and Wisdom of God cannot make such a Revelation of his Will to them as would be credible; such as they should reasonably judge sufficient for their Conviction.

This therefore is all that I shall say to this Part of the Objection; that if they suppose, as they seem to do, that Almighty God cannot any ways so reveal his Will to any Man, as that the Prophet himself can be assured that it is a divine Revelation; they suppose God to be of less Power and Skill than a Man is, who can utter his Mind in such a Manner to another, that the other shall have no Doubt, who it is that speaks, or what he means: But if they will but vouchsafe to grant, that God could now speak, or otherwise reveal his Will, in such Manner to us, as that we could not possibly have any Doubt, whether it was the Voice of God or an Angel or not, then I say there can be no Question but that he might speak in as plain a Manner to Men in former Times; and there is almost as little Question but that he has done so.

But many (it may be said) have pretended to Inspiration or Revelations, and, we have Reason to believe, have thought themselves inspired, when yet the Matter they have said they were inspired with, or which they have said has been revealed to them has been such as has clearly evidenced to all rational Men the Falsity of their Pretence.

True; And so likewise many Men have thought themselves at such a Place, in such a Company, hearing, seeing, speaking or doing such and such things, when yet, as it proves afterwards, they have been all the while only in a Dream: But what then? Does it follow that because a Man may think himself awake when
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he is in a Dream, he can therefore never be sure that he is awake? And as little does it follow, that because some Persons of weak or distempered Brains have thought they have had Revelations, therefore no sober and judicious Man in his right Wits, can ever be sure of a Revelation.

But suppose a Man at the first, being (as it may well be imagined he must be) in a great Surprise and Astonishment at the Strangeness and Novelty of the thing, should not be very certain of the Reality of the Revelation, should not well know whether he was awake or asleep; yet certainly the same signs which are sufficient afterwards to satisfy other Men of the Truth of his Inspiration or Revelation, must be allowed to be sufficient to satisfy himself of the same thing.

And therefore, If *Moses* (for instance) when God first spake to him in *Horeb* out of the burning Bush, Exod. 3. was in some Doubt whether he was in a Trance, or awake and in his right Mind; whether he really heard a Voice, or only dream'd so: it can't well be supposed that he continued in the same Doubt afterwards, when having at God's Command, *cast his Rod upon the Ground*, Exod. 4. 3, 4. *it became a Serpent*; and having at the same divine Command *taken it up by the Tail*, *it became a Rod again in his Hand*: And when after that, by his first putting his Hand into his Bosom it became *leprous as Snow*, and after his putting it in the second Time, *it came out like his other Flesh*. V. 6, 7.

Or if it can be imagined that he might possibly take all this to be only a Continuation of his Dream; or at least, might not in all this while be sure that it was not a Dream; it is not conceivable, however, that in all the Time that he was travelling from *Horeb* into *Egypt*, he should not ever be so thoroughly awake as to be sure that he was awake; and if he was, that he should

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not in all that Time make such Reflections upon what had passed, as either to perceive plainly that it had been only a Dream, or else to be very certain that it had not been a Dream, but a Reality.

Or if it can be conceived that his Amazement and Concern at what had happened was so great, that in all this Time he might not be so well come to himself, as to be sure that he had had a true divine Revelation; yet I think it was not possible that he should remain in the same Uncertainty, after he had been in *Egypt* for some while, and had wrought, not only those two Miracles over again in the Sight of the *Israelites*, whereby they were fully perswaded of his divine Mission; but likewise all the other great Signs and Wonders mentioned in the 7th. and following Chapters of *Exodus*, some of which the *Egyptians*, and even the *Magicians* themselves could not but acknowledge *were done by the Finger of God*.

But this, It may be it will be said, is proving one doubtful thing by another as doubtful, a Revelation by a Miracle: for it was further urged in the Objection, that no Author of any Book could be sure that he was not deceived in any other Matter that he has related as of his own Knowledge; that 'tis possible there might be Mistake in the Sign and Proof of the divine Revelation as well as in the Revelation its self; that 'tis possible that the Author of the Report (whether it was the Prophet himself, or any other Man who has reported the Miracles done by the Prophet, as Matters of his own Knowledge) did imagine he saw things which he did not see, and that he heard things which he did not hear.

But if this be supposed possible, that any Man, and much more that several Men agreeing in the same Report, the Organs of whose Senses were rightly disposed,

fed, and who by all their other Actions and Discourses appeared to be sober, and considerate, and judicious, should yet in the Day time, and in a clear Light, and when they were sure they were broad awake, be mistaken in the plainest Matters of Sense; then there is no such thing as Certainty in the World; Then they that make the Objection can be no more sure of what they themselves see and hear than other Men can be; And 'tis to no Purpose to hold an Argument with such as dare not believe their own Eyes and Ears. The only sense whereby, I think, such Men can be convinced, must be Feeling: And it will be well for them if they can carry the same Scepticism with them into the other World, and when they are compassed about with the Flames of Hell, can be able to doubt whether it be a real or a painted fire, whether they are tormented in that Flame, or not.

Leaving these therefore to be convinced in the other World, as being, I think, not capable of Conviction here; I shall content my self with having said, what, I suppose, is enough to satisfy others, That the Witness of a plain Matter of Fact may be sure of the Truth of what he witnesses; and that 'tis possible for God to speak so plainly to Men, that they may be certain they have had a divine Revelation; and that such Evidence may be given of the Veracity of an Author, and of the Authority of a Book as is *sufficient* to satisfy a reasonable Man.

And by this, and what was said before, I hope I have made it appear, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to effect its Design, viz. to bring Men to Repentance. Whether the *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be *sufficient* for this Purpose, will be Matter of Enquiry in the next Discourses.

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In the mean time, what has been already said may serve to dispose us to hear without Prejudice the Arguments that may be offered to prove the *sufficiency* of the *Holy Scripture*. For,

1. If it be possible that there may be such a *Standing Revelation*, it is very probable that there is one; for from that natural Notion that we have of the Goodness of God it may be fairly argued, that he is not wanting to Men in the necessary Means of Salvation; and therefore, it being evident that there are not new Revelations made every Day, it may be reasonably concluded that the Reason is, because there is already some *Standing Revelation* of God's Will extant that is *sufficient* to direct us in the Way to Happiness. And,

2. If there be already any such *Standing Revelation* extant, it may be strongly presumed, that it is that which we have in the *Holy Scripture*; because there is no other Book, that we know of, which has such good Evidences of divine Authority and Inspiration as that has.

Let us then be prepared to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Faith and Religion with unprejudiced Minds, with a sincere Love and Desire of Truth, and with a Resolution to hear Reason and to be convinced by it.

And above all, (which indeed is the best Preparation for Truth, and the best Security against Error) let us in the Sincerity of our Hearts, apply our selves to God for his Help and Direction; And that our Prayer may be effectual, let us be careful to approve our selves to him, by a conscientious Discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Temperance and Charity, which are clearly taught even by natural Reason; and be readily disposed to practise whatever else we shall learn to be our Duty by any farther Illumination: for *if any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.*

Joh. 7. 17.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

IN Epist. Ded. l. 3. r. *Arch-Bishop*, p. 8 l. 31. r. *forborn*, p. 13. l. 19. r. *be who*, p. 14. l. 16. r. *a Book*.

